

Margarete Zillig, Scotch Village, NS:

Now in her mid 60's, Marg. has been around sheep all of her life! When her immigrant parents, Gernot & Edith Zillig, settled on the farm in Scotch Village, Hants County, NS, in the year of her birth, they started with a flock of 6 grade Suffolk ewes from the Annapolis Valley. A mixed livestock farm with sheep (up to 400 ewes in the early 1990's), Jersey cattle, Yorkshire swine, and commercial waterfowl was built up over the years. Following the sudden death of her father in 1992, Marg. became more involved in the day-to-day operation of the farm alongside her mother, with some assistance from her brother, Manfred, who developed his own farm nearby. In the 15 years since the passing of her mother, Marg. has been looking after the farm solo, with reduced livestock diversity and numbers.

Since 1964 the family has been breeding registered Polled Dorset sheep of the traditional type, although some grade and crossbred stock is also kept. Participation in a performance testing program, nowadays the privately funded "GenOvis", has continued since the mid 1970's, (when the forerunner, ROP, first became available through a joint provincial and federal government initiative). Whenever the Purebred Sheep Breeders' Association of NS (PSBANS) sponsored a Maedi Visna testing program, the Zillig flock participated and was found negative. It is a closed flock, excepting the occasional addition of new ram power. In the late 1990's to mid 2000's, Artificial Insemination was employed on several occasions to introduce new Dorset genetics from Great Britain and Australia.

Marg runs her sheep, now approximately 80 breeding ewes, as two groups: one bred in the late summer for lambing from mid January – mid February; the second bred around the turn of the year for lambing in late May – early June. These breeding / lambing seasons are designed to produce lambs for particular markets, starting with the Greek Easter in spring and then fall – winter freezer lamb orders. Lambs are also sold to abattoirs, mainly Oulton's in Windsor, and there is a small, variable demand for purebred breeding stock. A few animals are usually entered in the Atlantic Sheep Sale each year.

The Zillig Farm has a long history of direct marketing its products, which, besides lamb, these days include geese, ducks, eggs, a small amount of garden produce and home preserves, sheep manure compost for home gardeners, as well as home-tanned sheepskins. Some families have been customers for 50 - 60 years, a few now in the second and even third generation of obtaining their annual order of lamb or their Christmas goose from this farm!

Margarete is a graduate of the former Nova Scotia Teachers' College, the former Nova Scotia Agricultural College (NSAC) and Macdonald College of McGill University, where she obtained the B.Sc. (Agr.) in 1984. She has worked in agricultural teaching and research at the NSAC as well as at the Agriculture Canada Research Station in Lethbridge, AB. Projects involving sheep included lamb feedlot growth, lamb carcass evaluation, testing three methods of ovine artificial insemination and scrapie genotyping. In the mid 1990's, she did a stint in the NS Dept. of Agriculture as Interim Small Ruminant Specialist, during the medical leave of the incumbent, Roy MacKenzie. In collaboration with NSAC Continuing Education, Marg. and colleague Gary Wallace prepared a sheep production short course, "The Modern Shepherd", in 2001, which they presented on several occasions, including in Newfoundland. She is a member of the Purebred Sheep Breeders' Association of NS, the NS Federation of Agriculture and served as the Atlantic Provinces Director to the Canadian Cooperative Woolgrowers for 12 years (2004 – 2016).

Through all of this, it can be said that for Marg, anything which can be learned about sheep is always of interest!!

"To have been involved with sheep in various ways over the years has been my privilege! I am greatly honoured to be accorded the award of Sheep Producer of the Year by SPANS, and, especially, to be a second-generation recipient! (Edith Zillig received the inaugural SPANS Producer of the Year Award in 1978!) Thank you so very much!"